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STATE DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH

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NEWS Release

For Immediate Release

Topic: Widespread Increase in Diabetes

Shows in Health Report

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Deaths from heart disease, stroke and cancer are down, but deaths from diabetes are on the rise in states across the nation, including Mississippi. The Mississippi State Department of Health addresses the public health concern through prevention and educational efforts.

Healthy People 2010 – the nation's report – addresses the increasing burden of diabetes and its complications as "alarming." But early detection, improved delivery of care, and better education for diabetes self-management can reduce the alarm and the burden.

"Diabetes is a very serious disease that affects many Mississippians each year," said State Health Officer Ed Thompson, MD, MPH. "Our goal is to control and combat the disease through risk factor reduction, early case finding, and prevention of the complications of diabetes."

Mississippi has the highest per capita rate of diabetes in the entire nation. An estimated 225,000 people in Mississippi currently have diabetes, including an estimated 80,000 undiagnosed cases.

In addition to deaths, severe complications of diabetes, incidence, and prevalence of the disease all increased. But the number of people who got an annual dilated eye exam and who received some formal diabetes education improved.

Statewide, diabetics suffer from many diabetes-related complications. According to the American Diabetes Association, over 1,900 cases are diagnosed each year in Mississippi. Statistics from 1996 show that diabetes-related complications include 211 new cases of blindness, 964 lower extremity amputations, and 442 new cases of end-stage renal disease in Mississippians. Each year, diabetes contributes to an estimated 2,000 deaths from related causes.

Scientific evidence shows that aggressive management of diabetes can significantly delay or prevent the serious complications of the disease – kidney failure, blindness, and toe, foot, or leg amputations. Controlling blood sugar levels also reduces risk for heart disease – the major killer of people with diabetes.

Managing diabetes requires ongoing, daily self-management – good nutrition, regular physical activity, monitoring of blood sugar levels, and taking prescribed medications.

Diabetes is either a deficiency of insulin or a decreased ability of the body to use insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas. Insulin allows glucose (sugar) to enter cells and be converted to energy and is also used to synthesize protein and store fats. In uncontrolled diabetes, glucose and lipids (fats) remain in the bloodstream and, with time, damage vital organs and contribute to heart disease.

The Mississippi State Department of Health's Diabetes Program provides Mississippians with diabetes supportive services including screening and referral for definitive diagnosis, joint medical management, education, informational materials, and diet counseling.

Agency staff identify and assess the extent of problems associated with diabetes and find available resources to deal with the problems.

Insulin is provided at no charge to diabetics who are 21 years of age or younger and to gestational diabetics of any age.

The Health Department works to establish linkages with other health programs which will impact positively on the treatment and management of other chronic conditions found in diabetic patients. In FY 1999, the Diabetes Program served 841 patients and reported more than 1,642 diabetic monitoring visits.

The *Healthy People* reports are compiled by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services every 10 years to assess the state of the nation's health. For more information and free materials on diabetes, the public can call the National Diabetes Education Program at 1-800-438-5383.

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